

VERMONT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

**14 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, VT 05482
(802) 828-2942 (fax: 2660)
john.zicconi@vermont.gov**

RE: TB-512 Petition to Name the Terminal Building at the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport the “Walter E. Houghton Memorial Terminal.”

Decision & Order

Procedural Background:

This matter stems from a Petition filed by Gerald D’Amico to name the terminal building at the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport pursuant to 19 V.S.A. § 5(b)(1)(2) “The Walter E. Houghton Memorial Terminal.”

On April 2, 2020, Gerald D’Amico filed a petition signed by more than 50 Vermonters with the Transportation Board (Board) seeking to name the terminal building at the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport “The Walter E. Houghton Memorial Terminal.”

On April 20, 2020, Board Chair David C. Coen, pursuant to Rule VI of the Board’s Rules for Naming Transportation Facilities, deemed the Petition substantially complete.

On November 16, 2020, the Board, pursuant to Rule VIII(A) of the Board’s Rules for Naming Transportation Facilities, scheduled a public hearing for December 17, 2020 and provided written notice to all parties pursuant to Rule VIII(A)(1-8).

On December 17, 2020, a remote public hearing was held by Board-appointed hearing officer Pam Loranger at 3 p.m. via Microsoft Teams due to restrictions related to COVID-19. The Petitioner attended and gave a presentation at the public hearing, which was attended by 14 members of the general public. The Transportation Board also accepted written comment both before and following the public hearing.

On January 27, 2021, the Board heard a presentation by Hearing Officer Loranger and deliberated on the petition during a regularly scheduled meeting held remotely via Microsoft Teams due to COVID-19.

Findings of Fact:

1. Vermont state statute designates the Board as the sole authority responsible for naming transportation facilities owned, controlled or maintained by the State of Vermont, including state airports. (Title 19 V.S.A. § 5(b)(1)(2))
2. By Rule, state airport terminal buildings are eligible to be named by the Board. (Vermont Transportation Board Rules for Naming Transportation facilities, Rule III(I))
3. State statute empowers the Board to exercise its naming authority upon receiving a petition signed by 50 or more Vermont Residents. (Title 19 V.S.A. § 5(b)(1)(2))
4. The Board on April 2, 2020 received a petition to name the terminal building at the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport that was deemed by the Board's Chair, acting pursuant to the Board's Rules for Naming Transportation Facilities, to be in order.
5. The Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport and its terminal building are located in the Town of Clarendon, Vermont.
6. The terminal building as well as the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport is owned, controlled, and maintained by the Vermont Agency of Transportation, which is an arm of the State of Vermont.
7. On April 17, 2020, Vermont Agency of Transportation Division Director Michele Boomhower emailed the Board informing it that while the terminal building contains a plaque stating that in 1986 Vermont Governor Madelene Kunin "dedicated" the "Rutland Terminal Building," the terminal building at the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport carries no actual name.
8. Walter E. Houghton was born December 18, 1940 in Rutland, VT and died on March 13, 2019.
9. Mr. Houghton served in the U.S. Air Force, was a commercial pilot and at times during his career was employed by the State of Vermont where he

served as a member of the Vermont Aeronautics Board as well as the Manager of State Airports. Mr. Houghton during his Vermont career also was the Director of Aviation at the Burlington International Airport.

10. Mr. Houghton's aviation career took him to the State of Florida where he was employed as the Director of Aviation for the Broward County Department of Aviation.
11. While in Florida, Mr. Houghton taught courses in aviation planning, aviation history and aviation management at various Florida locations including Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Broward County Community College, McDill Air Force Base and Central Florida Aerospace Academy.
12. Mr. Houghton received awards from both the Florida Airports Council – Florida Aviation Professional of the Year – and the Greater Miami Aviation Association – the Glenn Curtis Award.
13. The Board received 11 written comments regarding the Petition: one was in favor of the naming, one expressed no objection to the naming, six opposed the naming and three supported naming the terminal building after a different individual.
14. Written communication opposing the petition included letters from the Town of Clarendon Selectboard, Rutland City Mayor David Allaire, Chair of the Rutland Airport Committee Joseph Giancola, and the Rutland Chamber & Economic Development Corporation.
15. The December 17, 2020 public hearing was attended by 14 people, including Mr. D'Amico the petitioner. Six people spoke: two in favor of the naming and four in opposition.
16. At the public hearing, Rutland County State Senator Brian Collamore spoke against naming the Terminal Building for Mr. Houghton. State Representative Butch Shaw who represents the Rutland County towns of Brandon, Pittsford and Sudbury, at the public hearing stated he was attending in his capacity as Chair of the Rutland County Statehouse Delegation. Rep. Shaw spoke against the naming and said his comments were supported by the delegation.
17. Two people who knew Mr. Houghton spoke at the public hearing in favor of naming the terminal building after him.

18. The Petition contains 118 signatures, 117 of which were from Vermonters. Of the 117 Vermont signatures, three were from people with Rutland County mailing addresses. All other signatories hailed from other parts of the state.

Discussion:

Aside from the petitioner, a total of 15 people either spoke at the public hearing or provided the Board written communication. Two individuals did both. While those who spoke in favor of the petition expressed their personal wishes, many of those who either wrote or spoke against the petition represented others.

The list of public entities opposed to the petition is noteworthy and includes the Rutland County Statehouse Delegation, the Mayor of Rutland City, the Rutland Chamber & Economic Development Corporation, and the Town of Clarendon Selectboard.

While the Board did not receive direct communication from the Rutland Airport Committee, Rutland City Mayor David Allaire, Rutland Chamber Executive Director Lyle Jepson, and Rutland Airport Committee Chair Joseph Giancola all informed the Board that the Airport Committee voted to oppose the naming request.

All dissenters spoke kindly of Mr. Houghton's many years of work dedicated to aviation. However, they also commented that Mr. Houghton's Vermont achievements occurred mostly on the state level, while a significant portion of his career took place outside Vermont in the State of Florida.

Those opposing the petition commented that other than being born in Rutland County, Mr. Houghton had little life connection to the Rutland region as well as scant direct connections to the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport itself. The dissenters commented that very few of the people they represent either knew or knew of Mr. Houghton.

Those who spoke against naming the terminal building after Mr. Houghton were unified in their wish that if the Board were to name the terminal building that the honoree should have a deeper life connection to both Rutland County as well as the

airport. One commenter noted that of the 117 Vermont signatures on the petition, very few – a total of three – held Rutland County addresses.

Another commenter noted that Section XII, Subsection G of the Board's Rules for Naming Transportation Facilities reads in part "when considering a proposal to name a transportation facility after a person or family, the Board may consider whether the person or family made some significant contribution to the transportation facility or the region where the transportation facility is located..." The commenter did not believe that Mr. Houghton met this threshold. The Board agrees. While the record shows that Mr. Houghton certainly lived an exemplary life dedicated to aviation that is deserved of both praise and recognition, his Rutland connection regrettably is not significant enough to memorialize the Rutland terminal in his honor.

The Board reviewed the matter, and on January 27, 2021 unanimously voted to deny the petitioner's request to name the terminal building at the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport "The Walter E. Houghton Memorial Terminal."

Order:

Accordingly, the Petitioner's request to name the terminal building at the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport "The Walter E. Houghton Memorial Terminal" is DENIED.

Dated this 1ST day of FEBRUARY, 2021.

So ordered:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David C. Coen", written over a horizontal line.

David C. Coen, Chair
Vermont Transportation Board

Concurring:

Richard Bailey
Wendy Harrison
Pam Loranger
Philip Zalinger